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No. 508. Gen. 18: 7–10. Lincoln interest

The President in his Proc.n very clearly & fully sets before our minds / reasons, motives & objects of our present rel. services. Read portions.

This is a very suitable document to issue from / hand of / Chief Magistrate of a nation wh. claims to be X.n – a document wh. expresses as nearly as may be / prevailing rel. conviction of / nation.

And yet we are sadly convinced how far from being X.n is / nation, by / knowl. of / fact th. but a moderate minority of / people of / loyal portion of this land will pay any outward regard even to such a solemn call as this. There is no advantage in our ignoring / fact th. / great mass of our people are practically irreligious, indisposed to no. reflection, unwilling to act upon / X.n law of love, or to take any such view of their conduct as will lead to humiliation before God & repentance & correction of / evil discovered. Indeed we s.d be very sanguine did we expect th. all / professed X.ns in our country, acknowledging / authority of / gov.t, w.d rightly impose

this occasion for self-searching & prayer. Business, worldliness, party feeling, political jealousy, distrust of / capacity of rulers & generals, dissent from / policy wh. shapes war-measures will render many yrs indifferent to / spiritual work of this day.

We have had so many discouragements & disappointments, tm many years of intestine warfare have so slowly made us aware of / magnitude of / trial Prov. had appointed for us, / end is so painfully postponed & result still so uncertain, th. I do not wonder th. a lethargy has settled upon our hearts, th. hope is depressed & th. faith falters. I confess th. I find great difficulty in devising / most profitable manner of giving direction to yr. thoughts.

Our desire s^d be to take before God our proper position, to believe th. our own sins go toward making / aggregate of our national sins, to seek light concerning our duty as citizens, & to acquire a rel. invincible purpose to do our duty to our country. It were easy for us to confess / sins of those who proximate or remotely, brought upon / land this harrowing & devastating war. It were easy to say th. each of us

never

wished it, nor worked for it. Thus absolving ourselves we may imagine th. our duty is done. But it cannot be thus discharged. We cant thus insulate ourselves from / nation in wh. we have our place, whose life & char. we help to form. We are required to look at our mo. influence, & to consider / effect both of our indifference & of our positive mo. actions. In a system such as ours where political pow. is so widely distributed, resp^y has an equal distribution, & indifference to / influences wh. are shaping / national char. & to / forces wh. are controlling / national destiny is a guilty disregard of resp^y. God is not indifferent to / course & conduct of nations, as is apparent from / passage of Scrip. wh. I have read as my text.

It is a feature to be noticed in / Bib. th. it represents / invisible & Supreme Ruler as giving special regard to nations. This is very prominent in / O.T. wherein we are more particularly directed to / fact & principles of / Div. gov^t; while in / N.T. we are more instructed in / mode & effects of / Div. Redemption. God recognizes nations as such.

He does not merely recognize individuals th. compose them; he very seldom makes reference to whole family of mankind. But he holds nations to a resp.y, he calls them to acc.t, he reproves & punishes them for their sins, he rewards them for their obedience. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, & all nations th. forget God". "Put them in fear, O Lord, th. nations may know themselves to be but men". "Blessed is nation whose God is Lord; & people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance". This peculiarity must strike one who reads W. of God w. his mind directed to it. Why s.d this be so? It seems th. it may be so, because by his own intention & ordinance people have gathered into nations. He has meant th. hu. brings s.d thus live, & so he has formed their natures & necessities. The great features of earthly history have been national. W.n we know history we must know rise & life work & destiny of nations. The prominence of individuals, excepting in purely intellectual respects, has been a result of their relation to history of their respective nations.

Man's in=

progress in social & mo. respects while terminating in / individual, has gone on in closest connection w. / prog. of nations. In nations / great forces of hu. life have been centralized, & very much thro' their govts. these forces have had their expression effected. You cant forget th. nations are also / great subjects of Prophecy. Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ez., Daniel, & John, all forecast w. varying definiteness / career, / pow., / destiny of nations. Individuals may here & there come forward in / sublime pictures of coming changes presented to / enraptured minds of these ancient seers. But such individuals seen are prominent as / representatives of / great contending dominating powers of earth. We cant suppose th. our nation is ~~un~~ noticed in these pages written by / finger of our God, & th. this great struggle in our land between principles so vital to humanity & Gos. is not prefigured under some prophetic symbol.

It is a significant matter th. God in his govt. of our race does so distinctly recognize / national lines wh. exist. It wd. indeed have been something to be wondered at, if this reference had not

been found in / Bib. A nation's life & char. are something then in / sight of / Most High. These stern despotisms of / ancient world, in wh. / prince was everything & people nothing, were mentioned again & again by him thro / mouth of his prophets. Their sins he rebuked & their doom he foretold. Remember th. their histories covered centuries, yet thro those long periods he scanned their course. As one organic whole he regarded them, & punishm. wh. came at last was for sins wh. had been long accumulating. "He visited / iniquities of / fathers upon / Children unto / third & fourth generations of them th. hated him". As I meditate this truth impresses me more & more - it is both more solemn & more interesting & attractive. We are all units in a national whole - particles in a body politic. The particles keep changing incessantly as in our nat. bodies, but / body does not lose its identity - / nation is / same. Along / course of its life go all its traditions, all its privileges, all its responsibilities, all its dangers, all its wisdom. It is not immortal, for we may visit / tombs of many dead nations; but while it lives we live in it, & we may do much to

prolong its life, it may be until / moment when all nations shall yield up their pow. to him who shall reign "King of nations as well as King of Saints."

We are to ask ourselves yea to ask God to-day, what can we do to prolong / nation's life?

And we may ask him w. exceeding high hope, for we must believe th. he wd have this nation live. We are blind if we cant see th. his Pow. has displayed wonders of arrangemt & of interposition & guidance concerning this nation in / length & breadth of / land. An able modern historian remarks w. truth & force - "A rel. impulse accomplished what commercial enterprise, commanding money & cant favor, had attempted without success. Civilized N-E. is / child of English Puritanism". It is to be hoped th. we shall never be ashamed of / parentage.

But if relⁿ was so potently / impulse th. made successful / colonizing of these savage shores, how has th. impulse been sustained? how has relⁿ kept pace w. / growth of / nation? Do we not here strike a vein th. leads us to our sins & to / causes of them?

Certainly no one wd expect hu. nat. to be changed by change of place & climate. In /

simplest days of these new communities there were sins: yet God manifestly favored a people who in ⁄ main so sincerely sought to found a commonwealth upon ⁄ principles of ⁄ Gos. Liberty, Justice, Charity, Faith, Integrity, Simplicity were ⁄ early fruits of ⁄ Reformed Relⁿ transfused to this part of this Continent. What Cⁿ be maintained in small societies became impossible in rapidly growing & expanding States. Immoralities & crimes have long outstripped all ⁄ means of Relⁿ to restrain them. Some of us have seen a great change in our own day. We have steadily grown to be more & more an irreligious people. Tho' Chs. have multiplied, & means of mo. good increased, & education has been more widely diffused, yet open wickedness has gained beyond all these suppressing & renovating forces. Wealth has increased w. ⁄ development of our rich domain & foreign commerce, & has brought its temptations & dangers. The Lord has placed us on trial as to contentness, luxury, materialism & worldliness in a rare manner by opening to so many ⁄ avenues to property; & as a people we have not stood

/ test very nobly. This same rebellion wh. has caused such woe & suffering had its rot in desires utterly selfish & materialistic – in caste, domination, pride, love of easily-obtained luxury. In all apologies for it I have been unable to discover anything noble, anything consonant w. / primitive dignity & generosity & earnest love of liberty of / Fathers of / Republic. If equal temptation had existed on / side of / North to break / bands of Union, there are many elements of a similar kind in this section wh. wd have flowed into a rebellious movement; but we may be thankful unto God, there is now no concentrating pow., like / Slave-Power at / South, to bring them together & to compel them to work its ends. There must be individual deterioration before there will be national degeneracy – especially so among a people where / popular will decidedly affects its public organs. If we admit th. in thirty years past our Congress & our Legislatures have grown shameful in char. & corrupt in practice, then we admit th. it is so by / allowance of / people. The mass of / people must

be growing less sensitive to wrong, to sensality, to selfish ambition, to / unscrupulous use of power.

There may still be a large conservative force of mo. ideas & practices, wh. makes our nation very different from a heathen one; there may be an active learn of Xn rights; but even / good w. / ungodly, / noble w. / base may be so deeply engrossed in business or tempting worldly objects, as not to measure how this tide of sin is rising & threatening to inundate / whole land. This seductive materialism, asking only for th. quietness, order, & legislation, & protection, & absence of moral agitation wh. it deems nec. to / swift accumulation of property & enjoyable spending of it, is one of our most comprehensive sins. It weighs all mo. & rel. questions in / balances wh. have sufficed for its gold & silver. This is / powerful incentive of Northern & Southern departures from / traditions of our nobler days. But this is not an incentive th. cd ever have produced a spiritual Gos., or an Apostolic mission, or a Reformation of relgn, or / founding of a Puritan Commonwealth & a Xn Republic. So far

as this materialism rules us it makes us Atheistic, unX^n, degenerate, selfish. We may say th. we are not as much so as many other nations, & therefore our punishmt has come too soon or too suddenly. But are we likely to avert / displeasure of / Almighty by saying to others - "Stand by, we are holier than you?" Is th. / spt wh. begets an hatred of sin & a true repentance? Neither has our punishmt come too soon, if it be effectual as a work of chastisemt & correction. It may even be destruction of much th. we gloried in, as a pov. of / earth we may even be weakened but if it brings forth / fruits of righteo if it leads to a deeper popular faith in / truth th. there is a God who rules among / nations, if it compels towards a return to / simplicity of earlier days & virtues essential to / stability of a republic, then will it not have come too soon, nor be too severe. God's judgmts are designed to be of a reformatory char. His chosen people he may therefore afflict / most severely, because toward them he has purposes of mercy. He often leaves / most guilty nations, as individuals, to their chosen way; while by well-ordered discipline he may purge away / sins

of a nobler people, as / instrument of his more bene=
ficent purposes on earth. It will not be arro=
gance in us to assume th. on acc^t of his mercy he
has sent upon us / sword of his justice. We can^t
but think th. he will not destroy a nation into
wh. he has graciously permitted / pow. of / Gos. of
his dear Son to penetrate so widely. Possibly his
judgm^ts have been / sinfler for / protection of these
precious elements of mo. purity & sal^n.

But all this makes not / actual sins of our
people any / less. Rather are they greater in guilt,
because of so much light as we have enjoyed both
from history & from Rel^n. Th. we s^d plunge into
/ same track of pride, luxury, sensualism, mater=
ialism, oppression, partiality & injustice, in wh. /
older nations have all gone to their sorrow or their
ruin, m^t hardly have been expected. And yet /
facts show th. hu. wisdom is a weak pow. against
nat. passions. Selfishness will finally produce /
same results under any form of gov^t. Political am=
bition, love of pow. & display, desire to favor / interests
of classes, covetousness, policy rather than principle
are impulses th. burn in / heart in a republic as
well as in a monarchy.

Otherwise Slavery never c^d have grown from what it was at the close of the Revolution to what it was at the commencement of the Rebellion. Historically here as everywhere it was an outgrowth of selfishness, however apologists may claim it as a system of benevolence.

These forms of selfishness wh. issue in any practical injustice directly inconsistent w. our political principles, w. our land declarations of the rights of men, ~~are~~ must be specially displeasing to a Just & Holy God. Our fault has not been so much in a lack of correct mo. ideas, or of mo. education, as in the prodigious & intense pressure of worldly interests tending to suppress these mo. teachings. From our youth up we have been taught the royal law - "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself". But when the young merge into active life they see in business, in politics, too often in rel. matters, th. the dominant & successful pow. is selfishness, & early lesson of a nobler law is laid away as a useless curiosity, unless God's good Spt. gives it vitality in the heart. Hence comes a gen. indifference to wickedness, as the heeding of God's higher law, & of the law of man's true worthiness & blessedness; & wickedness only assumes importance as it wars against the present

interests of society. Yet this is just as short-sighted policy, as it is defective principle. The nation th. takes God's Rev.n as the only foundation of its laws & practices, will pursue the safer path. "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship w. thee, wh. frameth mischief by a law?"

I have said th. we may ask of God w. hope the life & good of our nation. But we know th. an acceptable prayer must be accompanied w. a true repentance. We must humble ourselves before the Great Ruler, & forsake our sins, & not merely hold up our hands at the great sins of rebels & slaveholders.

What a momentous question it is - shall this tremendous war work the mo. as well as the political salv.n of the Am. people? Merely because we suffer in ten thousands of homes in the land, we shall not be morally better. Merely because one portion of the land is wretchedly impoverished, & the whole is heavily burdened w. debt - merely because a system of labor is changed, & an enslaved race is placed in a different status by the compulsory emergency of war - merely because new political combinations may be brought about & new measures for material progress may be inaugurated - we shall not be a purer & more godly people. Other nations have suffered worse & have been thro' like

changes without being much better morally, or safer politically. France furnishes us a notable instance.

Truth in virtue requires the use of positive powers: these powers are not solely hu. – they are div. since part of a supernat. Rev.n The pride of mere worldly statesmen will not allow th. They think everything can be done by the wisdom of their measures & pow. of their majorities. They make little acct. of those who are working w. the means, & those the means wh. God has given. They do not realize th. the mother of the land have more to do w. its real or wor than its statesmen. These spiritual facts we are called upon to realize. We all lament our calamities, but do we mourn over our sins, & sins of our people. Sins do not cease in times of war. Some kinds are only greatly aggravated. In an army some restraints are taken off wh. exist in ordinary society. Around the gov.t there crowds a horde of plunderers – where hundreds of millions are to be disbursed no hu. pow. can keep them off – "where soever the carcase is there will the eagles be gathered together". This is humiliating, but it is hu. – it has been so thro' all ages. It only vinces on the surface what has been growing in the heart. It s.d only deepen our conviction of the need

of the help of a righteous & merciful God to save our country.

"At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, & concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, & to pull down, & to destroy it; if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them". And saith the prophet Micah – "He hath shewed thee, O Man, what is good; & what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, & to love mercy, & to walk humbly with thy God"? Isaiah – "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, & to let the oppressed go free, & that ye break every yoke".

This work of repentance is not to be done merely to-day. We are to supplicate the Lord frequently for ourselves our country. We are to pray for our rulers, we are to do all in our pow. to sustain & encourage them. We are to discountenance the sin of rebellion, as well as all other sin. When we see what it has done in our land we s^d not regard it as a light sin. A gov^t wh. we have chosen for ourselves is emphatically ordained of God, & to seek its overthrow for an unjustifiable cause is as great a

crime as can be committed against God & humanity. If we admit this, then the logical & mo. conclusion irresistibly follows, as great as is the crime of such rebellion so great is the duty of an hearty support of the gov^t wh. must stand between us & anarchy, & must by God's ordinance demand our obedience & support.

The eloquent preacher & masterly writer, Robert Hall, in a discourse delivered when England was making vast preparations against invasion by Nap^n, expresses this duty with great precision & discrimination — "Their conduct is not to be approved who, in the present crisis, indulge in wanton & indiscriminate censure of the measures of our rulers. I say w. & in. because the privilege of censuring w. moderation & decency the measures of gov^t is essential to a free constitution. The temperate exercise of this privilege is a most useful restraint on those errors & excesses to wh. the possession of pow. supplies a temptation. While therefore we maintain this privilege w. jealous care, let us be equally careful not to abuse it. There is a respect due to civil governors on acc^t of their office, wh. we are not permitted to violate even when we are under the nec^y of blaming their measures. The more liberal sentiments of respect for institutions being destroyed,

nothing wd remain to insure tranquillity but a servile race of men." Some other sentences are so perfectly adapted to our situation, tho spoken in England just 60 years since, th. I must quote them — "At this season especially, when unanimity is so requisite, every endeavor to excite discontent, by revilling / char. & depreciating / talents of those who are entrusted w. / admin, is highly criminal. Without suspicion of flattery, we may be permitted to add, th. their zeal in / service of their country cannot be questioned; th. / vast preparations they have made for our defence claim our gratitude; & th. if, in a situation so arduous & in / managemt of affairs so complicated & difficult, they have committed mistakes, they are amply entitled to a candid construction of their measures."

I mt say much more th. wd be suitable to this occasion. If I have said any thing wh. shall help you to observe improve aright God's solemn & fraught lessons in this desperate & bloody struggle, I shall have done all I hoped to. It is plain th. our deliverance as a nation is to be wrought out thro immense trouble & suffering. The storm th.

has

been gathering its might for many years has taken us, & we cannot retreat from it. We must by God's blessing master it, or it will destroy us. Let us here then fan into an intense glow the flames of our patriotism. This is compatible w. true repentance & humility before God, w. Xty, w. every righteous aspiration of humanity. Let us renew our devotion to our country, our allegiance to our Constitution, our purpose to maintain the Union & our undivided territory, if so God wills.

Our future is w. Him. We must not expect that it will be all bright & prosperous. We shall have great troubles to know & difficult questions to solve, deep sorrows to soothe & eradicate. He has not prophesied quiet & happy events in these last days. Why shd we claim them? Let our prayer all the day be the hope expressed in the Proclamn — "All this being done in sincerity & truth, let us then rest humbly in the hope, authorized by the Divr teachings, that the united cry of the nation will be heard on high & answd w. blessings, no less than the pardon of our national sins, & restorn of our now divided & suffering country to its former happy condition of unity & peace."

Chas. K. McHarg
National Fast.
Winston April 30. 1863.

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